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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 003858

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DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS TO S/I AND NEA/I

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TAGS: MARR PARM PREL I2 KS

SUBJECT: IRAQ DEPUTY COORDINATOR STEPHENSON VISIT TO SEOUL:
NOVEMBER 2-3, 2006

Classified By: POL/MC JOSEPH Y. YUN. REASONS: 1.4 (b/d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) A U.S. delegation headed by Barbara Stephenson, Deputy Coordinator for Iraq (S/I), visited Seoul November 2-3 to express appreciation for the important role South Korea has played in Iraq, discuss plans for troops, and thank the ROKG for its willingness to lead a Regional Reconstruction Team (RRT). She welcomed the announcement by DFM Yoon that his government had selected a highly-qualified senior diplomat to lead the RRT (Park Gyu-ok, currently Minister at the ROK Embassy in Saudi Arabia, who will arrive in Irbil by the end of November). Yoon described the ROK vision of its role as "strengthen capacity building, based on efforts at Zaytun and KOICA, in a way that complements the Compact and supports reconciliation." He added that was how renewal of its forces would be sold to the ROK National Assembly.

¶2. (C) MOFAT Development Cooperation Division Director Choe informed Stephenson that the ROK would attend the launch of the International Compact with Iraq, but had no plans to increase its contribution beyond implementation of its 2003 pledge. ROK officials also said that because of security concerns they will not expand the range of their reconstruction effort beyond Irbil. S/I Stephenson strongly encouraged the ROK to share its own remarkable development experience with the people of Iraq and noted that "Irbil is what success looks like." MND Deputy DG for International Cooperation Choi noted that while MOFAT has the lead for RRT projects, MND must provide the logistics and security needed to carry them out. MND Assistant Minister Kwon urged clarification of the U.S. and ROK roles in the RRT, but voiced confidence the U.S. and ROK leads would work well together. END SUMMARY

¶3. (SBU) A U.S. delegation headed by Barbara Stephenson, Deputy Coordinator for Iraq (S/I), and consisting of Ambassador James Yellin, U.S. Deputy for the RRT in Irbil, Peter Evans, Deputy Director of the Iraq Political-Military Affairs Desk (NEA/I), and LtCol William Pitman of the Joint Staff J-5, visited Seoul November 2-3, 2006 to discuss the

Republic of Korea's future plans for its troops in Iraq and to hear its vision for the role it is taking on as leader of the Irbil-based RRT. Throughout her visit, S/I Stephenson expressed the USG's sincere appreciation for the important role the ROK has played in Iraq, noting that South Korea has the third largest number of troops there. (NOTE: Only the United Kingdom and United States have more than the ROK's current level of 2,400 troops in Iraq). She also thanked the ROKG for "stepping up" to lead an RRT, and praised the excellent civil-military relationship South Korean forces have built with local residents in Irbil through medical, engineering and educational programs. She said those programs had won over many hearts and minds in Irbil, and had been so successful they are now being used as models for similar reconstruction efforts elsewhere in the country. She and her delegation delivered that message to the following ROK officials:

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MOFAT)

Deputy Foreign Minister Yoon Byung-se
Development Cooperation Division Director Choe Ceol-kyu
North America Division III Deputy Director Chun Young-hee
Middle East Division Director Kang Do-ho

Ministry of National Defense (MND)

Assistant Minister for Policy Kwon An-do
Deputy Director General of the International Cooperation
Division BG Choi Jong-il
International Policy Team Director Kim Jeong-seop
ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff, Operations Directorate, Overseas
Deployment Division COL Lee Jeong-ha

RRT Leader and Vision

¶4. (C) S/I Stephenson's meetings in Seoul started off with the welcome announcement by Deputy Foreign Minister Yoon that his government had selected a highly qualified senior diplomat to lead the Irbil RRT. He did not give the person's name -- noting that it would take some more days to finalize their choice -- but noted that they had selected an Arabic speaker with 20 years of regional experience in the Middle East, who would be coming to Irbil via his current assignment in Saudi Arabia. (NOTE: Embassy was later able to identify that person as Minister Park Gyu-ok through established contacts in MOFAT's Middle East Division). DFM Yoon assured the delegation that the ROK lead would be arriving in Irbil by the end of November, would have the full authority of the ROK government to make the necessary decisions on the ground, and looked forward to working with Ambassador Yellin to get the RRT up and running by the end of the year. Yoon broadly described the ROK's vision of its role in the RRT as "to strengthen capacity building, based on efforts at Zaytun and KOICA, in a way that complements the Compact and supports reconciliation." He characterized the U.S. value-added as addressing "rule-of-law and other political aspects." During the visit, Ambassador Yellin was asked to explain the U.S. vision for the RRT. He did so by stressing five important points: 1) That the USG appreciated the ROK taking the lead and that he would fully support it as the RRT deputy; 2) That it was important that the Kurdish region be related to/not separated from the rest of Iraq; 3) That further democratization of the KRG was needed; 4) That a more participatory free market economy also needs to be encouraged; but that 5) Any solution to these problems has to be in line with what the Iraqi people want, and cannot simply be imposed upon them. All agreed that establishment of a good hydrocarbons law could go a long way to achieving these goals.

Selling It To The National Assembly

¶ 15. (C) DFM Yoon and other ROK interlocutors made it clear to S/I Stephenson that although the ROK Zaytun Division is operating in a very safe area of Iraq, the presence of troops there remains a controversial domestic political issue in South Korea. Yoon said his ministry had briefed the National Assembly informally on the RRT and that in doing so it had emphasized the national building aspect of the Zaytun's efforts while downplaying the military situation. That approach has helped to minimize opposition from the National Assembly, Yoon confided, adding that his government prefers to keep the issue "very low key, with no fanfare." He welcomed an offer by NEA/I Deputy Director Evans to share with the ROKG information on how the USG has described the RRT to its own Congress. Wrapping up the discussion, S/I Stephenson said, "Although our gratitude is boundless, we will keep it to the level of public expression that you want."

ROK Reconstruction Effort

¶ 16. (C) During a follow-on lunch with MOFAT officials hosted by Development Cooperation Division Director Choe Ceol-kyu, S/I Stephenson's delegation delved into more detail with their counterparts on ROK reconstruction efforts in Iraq. Director Choe said the ROK had thus far contributed \$260 million in Iraq, for projects administered through the Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) in both Baghdad and Irbil. In Irbil, decisions on the most appropriate use of the money were made after direct consultations with the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), Choe informed the Stephenson delegation. KOICA would like to venture beyond Irbil to consider starting projects in other parts of Iraq, but has been unable to do so because of the security problems afflicting much of the rest of the country. Korean oil and

reconstruction companies were also eager to go into business in Iraq but the South Korean government currently does not allow its citizens to travel there. Complaining that his division had to work hard to convince one National Assembly member at a time to support the reconstruction effort, Choe went on to explain that is because every assembly member worries about the safety of ROK nationals operating in Iraq. Choe said the ROK would attend the launch of the International Compact with Iraq, but that it had no plans at present to increase the level of its reconstruction effort, saying that for now the ROKG was focused on full implementation of its total pledge from 2003 which included debt relief, in addition to the aforementioned \$260 million in funding.

¶ 17. (C) S/I Stephenson and her delegation strongly encouraged the ROK to share its own remarkable development experience with the people of Iraq, noting that South Korea had developed from a per capita level of less than \$100 after the devastating Korean War to \$14,000 today. However, both the MOFAT and MND officials with whom she would meet later in the day were careful not to promise any further ROK monetary contributions to Iraq, nor continuation of the Zaytun presence in Irbil beyond their expected renewal (at reduced levels) through 2007.

MND Recommends Troop Renewal

¶ 18. (C) In a meeting later in the day with MND Deputy Director General of the International Cooperation Division, Choi Jong-il, General Choi recounted how he had helped to set up the Zaytun base in Irbil as deputy commander there in 2004 and expressed interest in the political situation in Iraq following the President's recent meetings with Prime Minister Maliki. Asked by S/I Stephenson how moving to Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC) would affect the Zaytun's operations in the North, BG Choi proudly answered that the Zaytun had overcome initial opposition from the local community in Irbil to earn their "eternal friendship" and that the local people now wanted them to stay there permanently. He said that what

is most pertinent for the ROK military to know is:

- What are the U.S. and MNF-I plans in Iraq? and
- What are the security conditions there?

The answers to both questions are important for the ROK to know as it goes through the process, between now and the end of the year, of considering renewal of its forces there.

General Choi cited Defense Secretary Rumsfeld's words of gratitude at the October 2006 SCM for the ROK's role in Iraq, Afghanistan and counter-terrorism efforts, and stated that MND supports extension "to maintain its accomplishments in Irbil," but cautioned that renewal of ROK troops to Iraq would depend upon "the will of the people, the decisions of politicians, and international trends." S/I Stephenson assured General Choi that the U.S. fully understood that was the case, yet urged MND to tell the ROK National Assembly that "Irbil is what success looks like."

¶9. (C) General Choi went on to state that while MOFAT was in charge of the RRT, MND must provide the facilities and security. For that reason the Ministry of National Defense planned to attach a military liaison to the RRT lead before the end of December, he added.

Korean Pride in the Zaytun

¶10. (C) During the delegation's final meeting of the day with MND Assistant Minister for Policy, Kwon An-do, showing obvious pride in MND's role in safeguarding and reconstructing the Irbil area, urged the USG to listen to the advice of the Zaytun unit which had succeeded in winning the hearts and minds of the local populace without having to kick in their doors. He also suggested a mechanism be set up so

that lessons learned could be shared with the ROK by those who have established PRTs elsewhere in Iraq. S/I Stephenson asked Ambassador Yellin to take that suggestion back to Baghdad and encouraged the ROK to attend the next Partners Meeting in London, where its officials can talk directly with British, Italian and U.S. officials most familiar with other PRTs.

¶11. (C) Yellin said he wanted to pursue these projects as Deputy of RRT: 1) Relations of Kurdistan to the rest of Iraq; 2) Open KRG's governance so it is not so bifurcated between the PUK and KDP; and 3) Open KRG's economic system so it does not also reflect the schism of PUK/KDP politics.

¶12. (C) Kwon concluded the meeting by saying there was a need to clarify roles and consult on overlapping areas of responsibility as we move forward together to implement the RRT, but voiced confidence that the U.S. and ROK leads would work well together, commenting that South Korea was accustomed to teamwork with the United States.

¶13. (U) Deputy S/I Stephenson has cleared this message.
VERSHBOW